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## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

*Commentary to the Germanic Laws and Mediaeval Documents.* By  
LEO WIENER. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Pp. lxii  
+ 224.

The author of this book is evidently a man of great industry, with a wide range of reading, and a smattering of many languages. But all this is wasted. For the worse than puerile etymologizing, put forth with the air of a cocksure dogmatist, reveals, or rather displays, an incredible ignorance of language development. Here's a sample:

"The meanings of Goth. *teihan*, etc., are distinctly derived from the rubric '*testibus soniis*,' [which] was popularly pronounced *testibusonis*, *tehtibusonis*, and as such has survived in the AS. *tiht-bysig* 'infamatus et accusationibus ingravatus,' a back formation from *tiht-bysignis*, *testibusonis*. . . . Now, the long rubric *testibusonis* has survived in Old French in the abbreviated form *busun*, *busuigne* 'legal necessity, important affair,' which has ultimately produced *besoin*. . . . Thus French *besoin* and English *business* go back to *testibusonis*, but, while the whole has produced the AS. *tihtbysig*, the first part *tiht*, OHG. *ziht*, means 'accusation, crime,' and from this has come by a back formation Goth. *teihan*, and so forth." Now even a pupil in a grammar school ought to know that *busy* is not a "back formation" from *business*, and every beginner in Germanic philology knows that OE. *tiht*, OHG. *ziht* are verbal nouns from OE. *teon*, OHG. *zihan*, Goth. *teihan*, and that these have no more connection with *testibus* than *sauerkraut* with *surculus*. As for *besoin*, I leave it to my Romance colleagues to rescue it from its criminal surroundings.

In the same way the author "derives" *treu*, *Trost* from Lat. *extrudere*; *dienen*, *Dirne*, OHG. *diu* 'female servant,' *diot* 'people,' etc., from Lat. *devotus*; *shield*, *Schild* from Lat. *scutum*; *guilt* from Welsh *gwyliad* 'a watching' (which isn't so bad if it means 'watchful waiting'); *aware*, *war*, *warn*, *warrant*, *guarantee*, *garnish*, *garrison*, *bewahren*, *wehren*, *Krieg* from Lat. *gerere*; *ward*, *guard* from Lat. *cortis*, *cohortis*; *walten*, *Wald*, *wild* from Lat. *ex squalido*; *Wüste*, *Forst*, *frisch* from Lat. *vasta*; *Schatz* from Lat. *excoctum*; and many others, all preposterously wrong.

Thus page after page, without one glimmer of linguistic sense, the author rolls out his "derivations" *ex squalido* and his "back formations" *ad nauseam*, appealing only to the ignorant for a hearing and to smatterers for support. But though the book is worthless as a scientific production and harmless as an iconoclastic effort, yet because it issues from an old university its influence may be pestiferous. For it can only cast discredit on American scholarship and bring philology into disrepute. Was that perhaps the reason the book was written? Have we here another Cervantes with a philological Don Quixote going forth on a mock campaign to make all linguistic study ridiculous? If so, then the reviewer has wasted his time and the valuable space of *Modern Philology*. He must cry *peccavi* (a "back formation" from *peek-a-boo*, indicative of the great light that has dawned upon him), and can only regret that his eyes were holden that he could not recognize the colossal humor of this all too cruel satirist.

FRANCIS A. WOOD